

# ITEM 14 – APPENDIX I

## WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17 MARCH 2014

#### EXECUTIVE – 1 APRIL 2014

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**Title:**

**CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Stefan Reynolds]**

**[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

This report sets out a new Corporate Communications Strategy for Waverley Borough Council. The proposed strategy seeks to set out a clear framework for council communications and give direction to publications, digital, press, emergency and internal communications. It has been shaped and influenced by public feedback and the views of councillors and officers. All councillors were invited to attend workshops and give their views on the strategy, which is attached at Annexe 1.

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

The proposed Corporate Communications Strategy seeks to support the delivery of all of the Council's corporate priorities. It particularly seeks to support the Council's commitment to providing customer-focused services at the best value for money and understanding residents' needs.

**Financial Implications:**

This report does not have any financial implications beyond the growth items already agreed as part of the 2014/15 Budget. The Strategy aims to achieve better value for money by moving to a more focused approach as set out in 6.2.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

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**Serving ALL Waverley's communities and customers – offering both digital and traditional channels**

1. Advancements in communications technology have been rapid, offering organisations the opportunity to communicate with customers more quickly and cheaply than was previously possible. Waverley Borough Council, like all public services, needs to ensure it meets the expectations of customers and communities who have already adopted new technologies and those who will adopt them in the future. However, a significant number of our customers are not adopters of digital technology or simply prefer to access information via our customer magazine 'Making Waves', the telephone or the press. There will also continue to be

occasions where non-digital channels of communication provide the optimum or only viable option. The proposed strategy therefore confirms the Council's clear commitment to serving all customers equally by providing both digital and non-digital, or 'traditional', channels of communication.

### **How feedback has shaped this strategy**

2. Response data from the Council's citizen's panel demonstrates an appetite within Waverley's communities for information to be delivered by electronic means. Waverley's website was identified by respondents as being the most popular channel for finding out about Council services both in terms of how people already access information and how they would ideally like to. The second most popular channels were 'Making Waves' (the Council's magazine) and the telephone. This balance between those who wish to receive digital information (and the growing amount of those doing so via a mobile device) and those who continue to wish to use more traditional methods has shaped this strategy. It has been recognised that more needs to be done to develop our mechanisms for social media and digital communications but the significant demand for non-digital communications is also recognised and will continue to be catered for.
3. Feedback from elected members who participated within the strategy workshops has also shaped the strategy. Five themes in particular emerged from those workshops, namely:
  - i. Increasing our communication with town and parish councils;
  - ii. Delivering more proactive Public Relations;
  - iii. Having a clearer communications strategy during local emergency or crisis situations;
  - iv. Community signposting – physical signage/branding in and around the borough
  - v. Clarifying how we gain customer engagement & insight.

### **Key aims and principles**

4. The strategy sets out five key aims it seeks to achieve, namely:
  - i. to ensure that our information is easy to understand, access and interact with and that we listen to our customers - reflecting their feedback into service development and communications;
  - ii. to clearly define and communicate our identity, roles and responsibilities to different stakeholder groups; elected members, staff, residents, businesses, visitors and partners;
  - iii. for all our stakeholders to have a clear understanding and positive perception of us and what we do; leading to even higher levels of satisfaction and engagement;
  - iv. to place communication at the centre of all council activities – one organisation with clear, strong, messages underpinned by consistent standards; and
  - v. to provide a framework and advice for effective communication across the organisation.

5. The strategy sets out six key principles by which these aims will be achieved, namely:
- i. Achieving measurable change or action – ensuring that wherever possible that our communications activity has an impact;
  - ii. Delivering effective and efficient communication – ensuring the most appropriate channel is used for each audience / situation;
  - iii. Proactive, customer focused approach – minimising wasted effort and prioritising media activity to ensure optimum impact;
  - iv. Digital first – meeting the increasing demands for digital communications channels whilst continuing to equally serve those who cannot or choose not to use this technology;
  - v. News delivered at the heart of our communities – supporting digital and offline communities in Waverley to share information and news; and
  - vi. Connected councillors – supporting those elected member who wish to understand, utilise and engage with new digital communications channels.

## **Conclusion**

6. Waverley Borough Council exists to serve its communities and customers. Effective and efficient communications are at the core of that task. The attached strategy seeks to set out a proportionate but ambitious approach to serving all customers equally and achieving value for money. Members are asked to recommend it, subject to any further amendments they wish to make, to the Council for adoption.
7. With the exception of Cllr Elliot Nicholls, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Corporate Communications Strategy. The Committee suggested that the approach to the print media be clarified to avoid concerns that Waverley was reducing its level of engagement with the local press; and that benchmarking against similar local authorities be included as a way of measuring the success of the Strategy.

## **Recommendation**

That the Executive recommends to Council that the Corporate Communications Strategy be adopted.

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## **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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## **CONTACT OFFICER:**

**Name:** Robin Taylor

**Telephone:** 01483 523108

**E-mail:** robin.taylor@waverley.gov.uk

**Name:** Melinda Brown

**Telephone:** 01483 523204

**E-mail:** melinda.brown@waverley.gov.uk